

Helen Adams Keller





The best and
most beautiful
things in the world
cannot be seen
or even touched.

They must be
felt with the heart
HELEN KELLER



Helen Adams Keller was born on June 27, 1880 in Tuscumbia, Alabama. In 1882, she fell ill and was struck blind, deaf and mute.

Beginning in 1887, Keller's teacher, Anne Sullivan, helped her make tremendous progress with her ability to communicate, and Keller went on to college, graduating in 1904.

Loss of Sight and Hearing

In 1882, however, Keller contracted an illness—called "brain fever" by the family doctor—that produced a high body temperature. The true nature of the illness remains a mystery today, though some experts believe it might have been scarlet fever or meningitis. Within a few days after the fever broke, Keller's mother noticed that her daughter didn't show any reaction when the dinner bell was rung, or when a hand was waved in front of her face. Keller had lost both her sight and hearing. She was just 19 months old.



When Helen Keller Met Anne Sullivan



Anne was a 20-year-old graduate of the Perkins School for the Blind. Compared with Helen, Anne couldn't have had a more different childhood and upbringing. The daughter of poor Irish immigrants, she entered Perkins at 14 years of age after four horrific years as a ward of the state at the Tewksbury Almshouse in Massachusetts. She was just 14 years older than her pupil Helen, and she too suffered from serious vision problems. Anne underwent many botched operations at a young age before her sight was partially restored.

Anne began her task of teaching Helen by manually signing into the child's hand. Anne had brought a doll that the children at Perkins had made for her to take to Helen. By spelling "d-o-l-l" into the child's hand, she hoped to teach her to connect objects with letters. Helen quickly learned to form the letters correctly and in the correct order, but did not know she was spelling a word, or even that words existed. In the days that followed, she learned to spell a great many more words in this uncomprehending way.

Helen's early writing, completed seven days before she turned seven (the page is dated June 20th, 1887)

1887
cat cat
cold cold
catch catch
latch load
load coal
doll hat
hall call boat
bad good
good good-bye



Helen Keller died on June 1, 1968, at Arcan Ridge, a few weeks short of her 88th birthday. Her ashes were placed next to her companions, Anne Sullivan Macy and Polly Thomson, in St. Joseph's Chapel of Washington Cathedral.